

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A wide area network printing system so configured that a contents server providing various information is operated to send print data to a document server via the Internet, and the document server is operated to send the print data to a remotely installed image forming apparatus via the Internet to allow the image forming apparatus to print the print data, wherein

the contents server includes:

data sending/receiving means which communicates various data including print data with a communications terminal of a user and the document server;

data storage means which stores the print data therein;

controlling means which controls the data storage means to read out the print data designated by a command requesting printout of the print data and controls the data sending/receiving means to send the print data to the document server when the data sending/receiving means receives the command requesting printout of the print data from the communications terminal; and

information fee accounting means which calculates an information fee relating to the print data and charges the user for the information fee when the data sending/receiving means sends the print data to the document server,

the document server includes:

communicating means which communicates various data including the print data with the contents server and the image forming apparatus;

storage means which stores the print data sent from the contents server therein;

data retrieving means which retrieves, from the storage means, the print data designated by a command requesting transmission of the print data sent from the image forming apparatus;

print fee accounting means which calculates a print fee in accordance with the number of copies of the print data retrieved by the data retrieving means, and stores the print fee as print-fee-related accounting data; and

communication controlling means which controls the communicating means to send the print data and the print-fee-related accounting data to the image forming apparatus, and

the image forming apparatus includes:

accepting means which accepts the command requesting transmission of the print data;

transmitting means which sends the command requesting transmission of the print data inputted from the accepting means to the document server;

receiving means which receives the print data and the print-fee-related accounting data from the document server;

outputting means which prints out the received print data; and

fee collecting means which collects the print fee from the user based on the print-fee-related accounting data when the receiving means receives the print-fee-related accounting data from the document server.

2. The system according to claim 1, wherein the information fee accounting means of the contents server is controlled to charge the user for the information fee relating to the print data when the data sending/receiving means sends the print data to the communications terminal.

3. The system according to claim 2, wherein the controlling means of the contents server controls the data sending/receiving means to send, to the document server, print data in which additional information is added to the print data sent to the communications terminal, as additional-information-included print data when the data sending/receiving means receives the command requesting printout of the print data, and controls the information fee accounting means to charge the user for an information fee relating to the additional-information-included print data by adding a surcharge when the data sending/receiving means sends the additional-information-included print data to the image forming apparatus.

4. The system according to claim 1, wherein

the controlling means of the contents server controls the data sending/receiving means to send the print data to the document server when the data sending/receiving means receives the command requesting printout of the print data, and controls the data sending/receiving means to send the print-data-related information fee calculated by the information fee accounting means to the document server as print-data-related accounting data,

the communication controlling means of the document server controls the communicating means to send, to the image forming apparatus, the print-data-related accounting data calculated by the information fee accounting means, and the print-fee-related accounting data calculated by the print fee accounting means, and

the fee collecting means of the image forming apparatus is controlled to collect from the user a certain fee based on the print-data-related accounting data and the print-fee-related accounting data.

5. A document server so configured as to receive print data from a contents server providing various information via the Internet and to send the print data to a remotely installed image forming apparatus via the Internet to allow the image forming apparatus to print the print data, the document server comprising:

communicating means which communicates various data with the contents server and the image forming apparatus;

storage means which stores print data sent from the contents server therein;

data retrieving means which retrieves, from the print data storage means, the print data designated by a command requesting transmission of the print data from the image forming apparatus;

print fee accounting means which calculates a print fee in accordance with the number of copies of the print data retrieved by the data retrieving means and stores the print fee as print-fee-related accounting data; and

communication controlling means which controls the communicating means to send the print data and the print-fee-related accounting data to the image forming apparatus.

6. The document server according to claim 5, wherein the communications controlling means controls the communicating means to send, to the image forming apparatus, the print-fee-related accounting data calculated by the print fee accounting means, and accounting data indicative of an information fee relating to the print data sent from the contents server.

7. A contents server so configured as to send print data to a document server via the Internet and to allow a remotely installed image forming apparatus to print the print data via the Internet, the contents server comprising:

data sending/receiving means which communicates various data including print data with a communications terminal of a user and the document server;

controlling means which controls the data sending/receiving means to send the print data to the document server when the data sending/receiving means receives a command requesting printout of the print data from the communications terminal; and

information fee accounting means which calculates an information fee relating to the print data and charges the user for the information fee when the data sending/receiving means sends the print data to the document server.

8. The contents server according to claim 7, wherein the information fee accounting means is controlled to charge the user for the information fee relating to the print data when the data sending/receiving means sends the print data to the communications terminal.

9. The contents server according to claim 8, wherein the controlling means controls the data sending/receiving means to send, to the document server, print data in which additional information is added to the print data sent to the communications terminal, as additional-information-included print data when the data sending/receiving means receives the command requesting printout of the print data, and controls the information fee accounting means to charge the user for the information fee relating to the additional-information-included print data by adding a surcharge when the data sending/receiving means sends the additional-information-included print data to the document server.

10. The contents server according to claim 7, wherein the controlling means controls the data sending/receiving means to send, to the document server, the print data and data indicative of the print-data-related information fee calculated by the information fee accounting means, as print-data-related accounting data when the data sending/receiving means receives the command requesting printout of the print data.

11. An image forming apparatus so configured as to receive print data, via the Internet, from a document server communicatively connected therewith via the Internet to output the print data, the apparatus comprising:

accepting means which accepts a command requesting transmission of print data;

transmitting means which sends the command requesting transmission of the print data to the document server;

receiving means which receives, from the document server, the print data designated by the command requesting transmission of the print data;

outputting means which prints out the print data received by the receiving means; and

fee collecting means which collects a print fee from the user based on accounting data which the receiving means receives from the document server when the outputting means outputs the print data.



12. The image forming apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the fee collecting means is controlled to collect a certain fee from the user based on the accounting data indicative of an information fee relating to the print data and the print fee both of which the receiving means receives from the document server.